Safe and Effective Treatment for Teens with Morbid Obesity – Early Intervention Related to Greater Success

Rates of adolescents with extreme obesity are on the rise, along with medical and psychological comorbidities. While prevention continues to be a primary focus, medical management of those who are already considered obese is disappointing, and teens struggling with their weight often become adults struggling with their weight with little hope of ever getting to a healthy weight.

Clinical practice guidelines have supported surgical weight loss options in appropriate candidates, and recent reviews demonstrate surgery is both safe and effective in adolescents. The diabetes resolution alone in those who’ve had bariatric surgery has some calling for surgery to be called ‘metabolic surgery’ and offered to those at lower weights with uncontrolled diabetes.

While referring providers have traditionally reserved bariatric surgery for those with the most severe medical issues, and heaviest weights, a recent JAMA Surgery study of more than 27,000 patients over 10 years shows that patients who had surgery at lower weights had a better chance of getting to a non-obese weight, and greater chance to benefit both medically and emotionally from the intervention. Just like with other chronic diseases, early intervention seems to promote the greatest results in patients who have weight loss surgery.

Pediatric surgeon, Dr. Aaron Lesher has partnered with Dr. Byrne and Dr. Pullatt and the bariatric team to offer a strong interdisciplinary program unique to the needs of teens who struggle with their weight. In addition to weight criteria (BMI>35 or >99th percentile with comorbid health condition, or BMI>40), adolescent patients with skeletal maturity undergo additional education and counseling with registered dietitians and psychologists with adolescent training and partner with the MUSC Pediatric Weight Management (Heart Health) Program to prepare for the diet, exercise, and lifestyle changes introduced after surgery.

With a 25+ year history of treating obesity with surgery, including almost 100 adolescents, the bariatric team has the resources to help our younger patients have a second chance, and truly highlights the benefits of early intervention.

Patients rely on their healthcare providers to start the conversation about their options, and for those who are struggling and have not had success with other methods of weight loss, consider discussing surgery sooner than later, and refer them to be evaluated by our team.

~ Nina Crowley, PhD, RDN, LD, Program Coordinator can discuss with you and provide information on program, criteria, or outcomes – call 843-876-7211, or crowleyn@musc.edu, http://www.muschealth.org/weight-loss-surgery/procedures/adolescent-surgery.html
~ referrals can be done under ‘Amb Referral to Bariatric Surgery’.
~ patients can call 843-792-3046 to schedule an evaluation with our team.